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Crisis Expo

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

Stephen Patrick Klimek

Candidate for B.Arch Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors

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Capstone Project Advisor: Brendan Moran

Honors Reader: Anda French

Honors Director: James Spencer, Interim Director

Date: _____

Abstract

The contention of this thesis is that architecture can create a venue for new forms or forums of civic and political engagement in a post industrial urban environment. Executing democratic processes of discussion, debate, and dissent is more important than the resolution to a given crisis. Yet in a world of impending crises architecture has yet to envision a truly contemporary form of assembly for the resolution of these issues by the Phantom Public. There is a politics of space because space is political⁴. Politics needs space. It exploits space as a resource, a site of debate, a vehicle for communication, an environment for consumption, and a place for capital accumulation.

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Preface

*"So you want to change the world? Start by changing the built environment."*¹

Many students enter architectural education with the notion that they are embarking on a lifelong journey to shape the world for the better, and if this is not the case I argue it should be so. But recent graduates seeking to sample the profession as interns have found an unfavorable state of affairs that does not match our hopes. Architecture firms certainly face serious challenges as they seek to attain work and retain employees. At the same time students and young architects need to repay college loans, eat, and pay rent.

But these issues are symptomatic of an over arching problem. Over the last several decades architects marginalized the discipline by stepping away from the complex problems of our world, eliminating risk while simultaneously seeding responsibility and power to effect real change. Marginalization from the social, economic, and political forces that shape our world has created a crisis of form, context, and social relevance in architecture.²

¹ Massey, Jonathan. "Five Ways to Change the World." *Design Observer* (2009). Web.<<http://places.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=10687>>.

² Turan, Neyran, and Stephen Ramos. *New Geographies After Zero*. Vol. 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2009. Print.

Today's architects are mere pawns in the process of manifesting the built environment. a small portion of today's profession champions a message of transformation but this has not yet manifested itself in academia or professional practice to instigate a legitimate change. Amidst this, architecture is at a point of self-reflection: we can embrace the starchitects' signature forms and an insular practice or, we can seriously rethink form in relation to its larger sociopolitical context. The world around us is at a breaking point and its future depends on architects and urbanists with the skills and vision to break away and start making claims about the position of architecture. It is true that students are the future of the profession, but relying on this idea will only perpetuate the same issues that have forced us into the corner today.

As students and young professionals we are at an inflection point in our world and it is our burden to bear. Without animosity we should embrace it with open arms. Vice President Joseph Biden's 2009 Syracuse University Commencement address makes exceptionally clear the potential of our generation:

"There has never been a time when students are graduating at a moment when they actually have the chance to make more than incremental change. That's where we are today. Throughout the span of history, only a handful of us have been alive at a time when we can actually shape the course of history. I call these inflection points. There's not a single decision confronting us now that

doesn't yield change from non- action as well as action. The world we have built cannot sustain itself in the direction it's going now. Just as with every generation that is at an inflection point in history, it's totally within your power to shape history and literally bend it."

In a time of relatively heightened activism and social consciousness, student-generated initiatives are trending towards the latter, more expanded role of architecture. An economy in which securing a traditional internship is difficult presents the perfect opportunity for experimentation and the application of creative design thinking.

So, what do we do? Ultimately, we need to become players and stakeholders in the development our future. To do this we need to make claims. Students should not be afraid to take positions and express their informed opinions. This means reading and listening to anything that someone can argue as 'architecture' and beginning a lively discussion in your studio, classroom, firm, or amongst the young professionals in your community. Expanding the role of architecture and the definition of design can change the populations we serve and the issues in which architects should be experts.³ Doing so opens a multitude of new avenues for design work and research, and opportunities for architects to get out of the

³ Gamez, Jose S., and Susan Rogers. "An Architecture of Change." Introduction. *Expanding Architecture: Design as Activism*. Ed. Bryan Bell and Katie Wakeford. New York: Metropolis, 2008. 18-25. Print.

design bubble and learn the skills of parallel professions including politics, economics, urban planning, philosophy, and more.

Simultaneously, we need to get out of the studio and take action within this expanded definition of design. Designing and implementing the back and forth process between staking claims and testing them will prove to be one of the most difficult yet rewarding experiences. This means creating and growing Freedom by Design programs across the country. This means lobbying your school for design-build studios and taking control of your education by creating your own extracurricular initiatives that address community problems while simultaneously testing and growing your design and construction knowledge.

If you can't get a traditional internship, move beyond freelance work and start your own entrepreneurial venture using your skills and interests grounded in design. Potential employers will hire you on the spot as you describe your business model, profit margins, and built work instead of reviewing perfectly crafted models and drawings. If you have the opportunity to do so, earn a degree in public policy, business, or urban planning. Learning these related disciplines from an architectural perspective is the only way to adjust design practices to work alongside them, instead of for them. And whether or not you have a job, volunteer for a non-profit that addresses issues surrounding the built environment in

your community, a political campaign; anything you can do to learn who your work truly serves.

Ultimately, we need this action now. Without visionaries willing to break the boundaries of contemporary architecture and explore the design implications of global and local problems we will become obsolete decorators instead of much needed problem solvers. Small scale realizable initiatives can lay the groundwork for an ever expanding and more relevant world for architecture and design. So take a step, no matter how small, shout your claims from the rooftops, and design a plan for the next two steps after that.

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Nathaniel Wooten

Team

Chris DePalma

George Guarino

Michalle Williams

Cristina Hoover

Lindsay Royer

Position

The contention of this thesis is that architecture can create a venue for new forms or forums of civic and political engagement in a post industrial urban environment. Executing democratic processes of discussion, debate, and dissent is more important than the resolution to a given crisis. Yet in a world of impending crises architecture has yet to envision a truly contemporary form of assembly for the resolution of these issues by the Phantom Public. There is a politics of space because space is political.⁴ Politics needs space. It exploits space as a resource, a site of debate, a vehicle for communication, an environment for consumption, and a place for capital accumulation.

Crisis is the inability of an existing set of institutions and systems to resolve a complex issue. The strongest and most unfamiliar problem is the most suitable candidate to facilitate democratic processes. Crisis is an opportunity for new alternatives to be discussed and debated that would not have been considered before. This thesis asks if there is a space for the unfolding of these democratic processes in the 21st century American city. The product is the design of a literal and figurative vehicle for Architecture to build a case for its value and relevance in the democratic process.

⁴ Lefebvre, Henri, Neil Brenner, and Stuart Elden. *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009. Print.

Summary of Terms

Politics is the total complex of relations between individuals in society.

The ever evolving nature of these relations makes politics a process of individual and collective decision making more than anything else.⁵

Polis is the definition of a city not by its walls of stone or glass but also by the total complex relations of its citizens. The legal conception of the city described by Gerald Frug sits between the two as a political entity ruled by its body of citizens. Legal lines cross between physical boundaries and across cultural and ideological distributions. A polis is activated by three key elements; discussion, debate, and dissent.

Politeia is the constitution which necessitates the formal city-state.

Aristotle defines the constitution as "a certain ordering of the inhabitants of the city-state" (III.1.1274b32-41).⁶ He describes the constitution of a community as "the form of the compound" and argues that whether the community is the same over time depends on whether it has the same constitution (III.3.1276b1-11).⁷ The constitution is not a written document,

⁵ Lefebvre, Henri, Neil Brenner, and Stuart Elden. *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009. Print.

⁶ Miller, Fred, "Aristotle's Political Theory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/aristotle-politics/>>

⁷ Ibid

but an imminent organizing principle, analogous to the soul of an organism.

Politês are the citizens of a city, the people who are engaged in an unwritten constitution with one another by their proximity and either shared or differing beliefs. A city defined by its people can share definitions or can equally be divided by differences in values and opinions. The people of a city construct collective or cultural ideals by aggregating their individual values. This was first defined by Hobbes in the fifteenth century as a Leviathan, a body made at the core by the governed and lead at the head by the governing.⁸ Represented graphically, the leviathan or body-politic concept necessitates territory, architecture, and urbanism to construct its geographies of power.

Parliament in its etymology is a term for "making things public". In this process there is a collection of dissimilar "things" as issues that bring people or objects together because it divides them. While "Thing" is the assembly of dissimilar entities; "Parliament" is making this divided union public.⁹

⁸ Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel. "Introduction." *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005. Print.

⁹ Ibid

Phantom Public is the body-politic of contemporary society, replacing the fifteenth century notion of the Leviathan.¹⁰ In this system the true public only becomes involved in politics with the current institutions and communities have proved themselves incapable of settling a complex issue. As such the public exists as a phantom, an invisible and undefinable force that can aspire at will.

Public is a collection of alien characters. A grouping of actors who are affected by human action but do not have direct influence on those actions. The public is the leveling power of the Phantom.

¹⁰ Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel. "Introduction." *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005. Print.

Politics

1. Political: politikos (of, or pertaining to, the polis)

Politics is the total complex of relations between individuals in society.

The ever evolving nature of these relations makes politics a process of individual and collective decision making more than anything else. This individual collective binary pertains to the Polis, the definition of a city not by its walls of stone or glass but also by the total complex relations of its citizens. Commonly exchanged with City-State from ancient Greek history, the Polis and the City-State are reemerging in the post-political and post-national urban landscape of consensus driven policies and transnational forces define the status quo.

Manifested spatially politics has historically use architecture and urbanism as tools to institute regimes of power over certain territories. Self isolated in the last half of the twentieth century Architecture no longer participated in the political conversations it had in the rise of democracy after colonialism, the industrial revolution, the socialist movements across Europe, and the rise of totalitarianism around the globe. In democratic societies we can see and understand the space of politics in legislative chambers, mass rallies, voting booths, and public space.

In a post-political urban landscape how can we define or redefine the Polis as a physical or virtual space for the open exchange of ideas? Can the creation of space be defined by events and the meeting of people with similar or different ideas or by temporary structures? Does a polis need to be mobilized by an equally mobile and versatile vehicle?

Western policy negates the antagonistic dimensions of politics proper by seeking to attain a morally construed consensus rather than engage in debate. Architecture needs to envision a “common symbolic space” that would facilitate confrontation. The places and zones of actual contradictions are starting points for utopian –formative interventions. These include factories, industrial farms, housing estates, commercial zones, suburban enclaves, large scale urban ensembles ie roads, canals, tunnels, ports, bridges, rail, highway, airports, public utilities, and techno institutional infrastructure for communication and surveillance.¹¹

¹¹ Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel. "Introduction." *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005. Print.

Polis

Polis is used to describe the city center as a physical entity confined by natural and constructed boundaries. The legal conception of the city described by Gerald Frug sits between the two as a political entity ruled by its body of citizens.¹² Legal lines cross between physical boundaries and across cultural and ideological distributions. A polis is activated by three elements; discussion, debate, and dissent.¹³

Understanding polis we must also understand the contemporary city not as an independent object but instead as a network of socially produced relationships closely related to policy and governmentality, because of which it can't be anything but designed. With an increasingly urban world population cities and their influence are growing beyond their physical and political boundaries. City-States, or global cities are emerging within the nation state fabric and they are often at the heart of megaregions. Networks of metropolitan areas with integrated labor markets, infrastructure, and land-use systems that share and organize complex and interdependent transportation networks, economies, ecologies, and cultures.

¹² Frug, Gerald E. *The City as a Legal Concept*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law Review Association, 1980. Print.

¹³ Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel. "Introduction." *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005. Print.

To test this work the design intervention will be tested in the urban agglomerations of the midst dynamic megaregion, the Great Lakes region. The largest emerging region by its percentage of nation GDP, land area, and population. It is however also home to the rust belt and a majority of the nations underperforming cities and counties, indicating a wide spectrum of activity.

Identified since the 1960's as the emerging predominant megaregion, The Great Lakes Region and other megaregions in the United States have not made collective progress towards achieving common goals. Fueled by the interstate highway system that enabled its growth the region outperformed its predicted end of century population growth by twenty-five percent. Today it is also the focus of self sustaining alternative energy production. Because of its proven potential and existing challenges the Great Lakes Region is the ideal site for alternative political practices and the built environment needed to engage and sustain such alternatives.

“Urban agglomerations are very often seen as lacking the features, quality and sense of what we think of as cities. Yet urbanity is perhaps to charged a term, charged with a western sense of cosmopolitanism of what a public space is or should be. Instead, cityness suggests the possibility that there are kinds of urbanity that do not fit with this large body of urbanism developed in the west... We need to strip our concept of the city from the overcharged meanings it currently has.” - Saskia Sassen

Politeia

1. Constitution; Citizenship
2. Politeia (πολιτεία) is an Ancient Greek word with no single English translation. Derived from the word polis ("city-state"), it is an important term in Ancient Greek political thought, especially that of Plato and Aristotle.¹⁴

The formal cause of the city-state is its constitution (*politeia*). Aristotle defines the constitution as "a certain ordering of the inhabitants of the city-state" (III.1.1274b32-41).¹⁵ He also speaks of the constitution of a community as "the form of the compound" and argues that whether the community is the same over time depends on whether it has the same constitution (III.3.1276b1-11).¹⁶ The constitution is not a written document, but an imminent organizing principle, analogous to the soul of an organism. Hence, the constitution is also "the way of life" of the citizens (IV.11.1295a40-b1, VII.8.1328b1-2).¹⁷ Here the citizens are that minority of the resident population who are adults with full political rights. Aristotle uses "polity" both in that way, as the generic name for a constitution of any sort, and as the name of one of the sorts. One of the kinds of polity is "polity", i.e. the polity or form of government in which all citizens rule and are ruled in turn. The idea of polity is that all citizens should take short

¹⁴ Miller, Fred, "Aristotle's Political Theory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/aristotle-politics/>>

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

turns at ruling. It is an inclusive form of government: everyone has a share of political power.

Polites

1. A member of a city or state (polis), a citizen, freeman
2. Civis, a fellow-citizen

The body of citizens came to be the most important meaning of the term polis in ancient Greece. A city defined by its citizens is composed of multiple identities and value systems. A city defined by its people can share definitions or can equally be divided by differences in values and opinions.

Politês are the citizens of a city, the people who are engaged in an unwritten constitution with one another by their proximity and either shared or differing beliefs. The people of a city construct collective or cultural ideals by aggregating their individual values. This was first defined by Hobbes in the fifteenth century as a Leviathan, a body made at the core by the governed and lead at the head by the governing. Represented graphically, the leviathan or body-politic concept necessitates territory, architecture, and urbanism to construct its geographies of power.¹⁸

Today the individual is not a single dot anonymously amongst others and has become part of a complex network of communication and social practices. This changes the image of the body-politic today and forces a

¹⁸ Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel. "Introduction." *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005. Print.

new conception of the polis relationship to the governing and how that relationship is spread across territory. Ultimately this also necessitates different uses of urbanism and architecture to reinforce or perhaps even influence this new dynamic. Individuals and the collective express their political beliefs by demonstrating in public spaces and in front of great symbols of political power. In this case, politics need space for individuals to engage in discussion, debate, and dissent.

Considering the polis and the contemporary city, what becomes utopian in a time of individuality when utopia has traditionally been about the collective?

Praxis

1. Translating an idea into action; "a hard theory to put into practice"

"Crisis Expo" is the hypothetical curation of the Phantom Public's manifestation in the Great Lakes post-industrial urban centers. The event unfolds as celebration, spectacle, and festival of public political encounter in Buffalo, New York. "Crisis Expo" gives form to the Phantom Public as a fleet of ships which only come to port when there is a need for the Phantom to manifest, if at all. In his book "Of Other Spaces" Michel Foucault states that:

*"The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates."*¹⁹

The project seeks to make visible the process of a public's manifestation as a temporary monument and a celebration of democratic processes. Crisis Expo is both facilitator and exhibitor in the production of these processes. Crisis Expo exists as a floating regional government in the Great Lakes region. A fleet of ships float as "new ground" in international

¹⁹ Foucault, Michel. "Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces (1967), Heterotopias." *Michel Foucault, Info. Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*. Web. 21 Jan. 2011.
<<http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>.

waters free from jurisdiction and oversight. It's role as a governing entity is in sync with the phantom public, manifesting itself in a territory only when a polis has reached a breaking point of crisis.

"Crisis Expo" exploits space as a resource and repurposes post-industrial space to prepare a site for its events. The site preparation becomes a spectacle for the city and marks the beginning of the event. A series of permanent and temporary structures are built to create a landscape for debate, a vehicle for communication of those ideas and positions, an environment for consumption, and a place for capital accumulation.

The pavilions and Vessels create a new landscape for public assembly. The driving forces of neoliberal market economies are employed as a tactic to draw different members of a polis into the site. Entertainment; as a form of recreation and interaction, and Exchange; as a means of changing goods and ideas between different groups, are used to bookend the political landscape and activities of Crisis Expo.

The landscape and event become a true Parliament, a collection of dissimilar things that are inherently in conflict with one another. In forcing this conflict, subtly or not, the polis is given the opportunity to make visible a process of resolution.

The Pavilions provide a mix of programming between entertainment, exchange, and political activity. Space is provided for individual, group, and mass assembly through podiums, auditoriums, and the landscape.

The modular pavilion system and the notion of vessels as “new ground” enable the public and the polis to reconfigure the site at will. Rejecting a one size fits all approach to governance and democracy, the program is intended to be a flexible soft system.

Summary

“Crisis Expo” is a hypothetical architectural design that does not seek to propose an entirely realistic or ‘buildable’ project but instead propose a situation as a provocation. The beginning of this project began researching politics and democratic political theory in relation to urbanism in America. A series of definitions and terms were establishing including Crisis, Politics, Polis, Polites, in order to create a foundation for the next iteration of the design process. These terms crossed the boundary between political theory and the spaces and forms which architecture traditionally operates. This hybrid relationship is the source of the projects significance for both professions.

Creating a foundation involved understanding the real workings of political systems, the issues those systems were addressing, and the spaces in which both the decisions and issues take place. These spaces were mapped so they could be understood in relationship to one another and their level of political significance, and the visibility of the democratic processes they embodied. This includes everything from a polling station with high visibility during its use, to the source of energy production that fuels our neoliberal economy. This tension and awkward relationship between governance and free market economy is a constant theme in the project.

The next phases of the design process involved the application of the abstract mapping of urban political spaces to a specific hypothetical situation as proof of concept. I wanted my initial research into democratic processes to operate at multiple scales, at a regional or territorial level, at an urban level, and at an individual level. These three scales reflect the way in which democratic processes are carried out.

The driving force behind my project is the notion of 'The Public' as the source of democratic political power. The reality of contemporary politics is indirectly driven by individuals through market economy and consumption. This is the neoliberal model of governance. I paired this with the notion of crisis as the inability of an existing system to address a specific issue. In a world of seemingly impending crises, political, economic, and ecological, I wanted to create an architecture or a space for what happens when a true 'crisis' occurs. In this situation market economy politics ends and there is a shift in power. This is the manifestation of the Phantom Public.

The Public exists as a phantom in contemporary society. It only manifests itself when the existing systems that operate in its stead fail to perform a task or resolve an issue. "Crisis Expo" is design to facilitate this process of manifestation, and the democratic processes that it entails namely debate, discussion, and dissent.

In order to embody the concept of the phantom “Crisis Expo” exists permanently as a fleet of ships, floating as ‘new ground’ and invisible to anyone searching for it. The fleet of vessels will make itself visible in the same time and place the Phantom Public manifests. As such the architecture is temporary.

The fleet operates at a regional and territorial scale but manifests itself in an urban context. This creates a new landscape in which modular pavilions can be modified to the specific need of the Phantom and the issues they are contending with.

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Bell, Bryan, and Katie Wakeford. "Expanding Design Toward Greater Relevance." Preface. *Expanding Architecture: Design as Activism*. New York: Metropolis, 2008. 14-17. Print.

Currently studying at Harvard University as a Loeb Fellow Mr. Bell is deeply involved in SEED (Social, Economic, and Environmental Design), and organization committed to public-interest architecture. Intended for the architecture and design field, his article provides a foundation for students and emerging professionals to question the role of design and how the definition of design issues can be expanded. His goal is to give design a trajectory for greater relevance in local and global crises.

Frug, Gerald E. *The City as a Legal Concept*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law Review Association, 1980. Print.

Gamez, Jose S., and Susan Rogers. "An Architecture of Change."

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Print.

Jose Gamez is an Associate Professor of Architecture and Urban Design in the School of Architecture at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In addition, he is the Coordinator of the Design+Society Research Center, the schools public outreach program. His article "An Architecture of Change" written with Susan Rogers, Director of the Community Design Resource Center at the University of Houston, lays the claim for a political and ideologically driven architecture. Reviewing Modernisms unfulfilled promise and the resulting postpolitical movement, Gamez and Rogers provide a path for expanding architecture through civic, academic, and professional institutions.

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A leading source of research on the phenomenon of shrinking cities in North American and Europe produced by the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative at Kent State University. *Cities Growing Smaller* sources various research and theories on shrinking cities coupled with case studies of new and innovative approaches to vacancy, infrastructure, and regional revitalization in Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit.

Zardini, Mirko, and Giovanna Borasi, eds. *Actions: What You Can Do with the City*. Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2008. Print.

A compilation of ideas and projects designed to instigate change both with and against the grain of contemporary cities. Groups and individuals took action to address social, economic, and political issues as they saw an unsolved need in their community. “*Actions: What You Can Do With the City*” serves as a model for community based design activism and realizable urban interventions.

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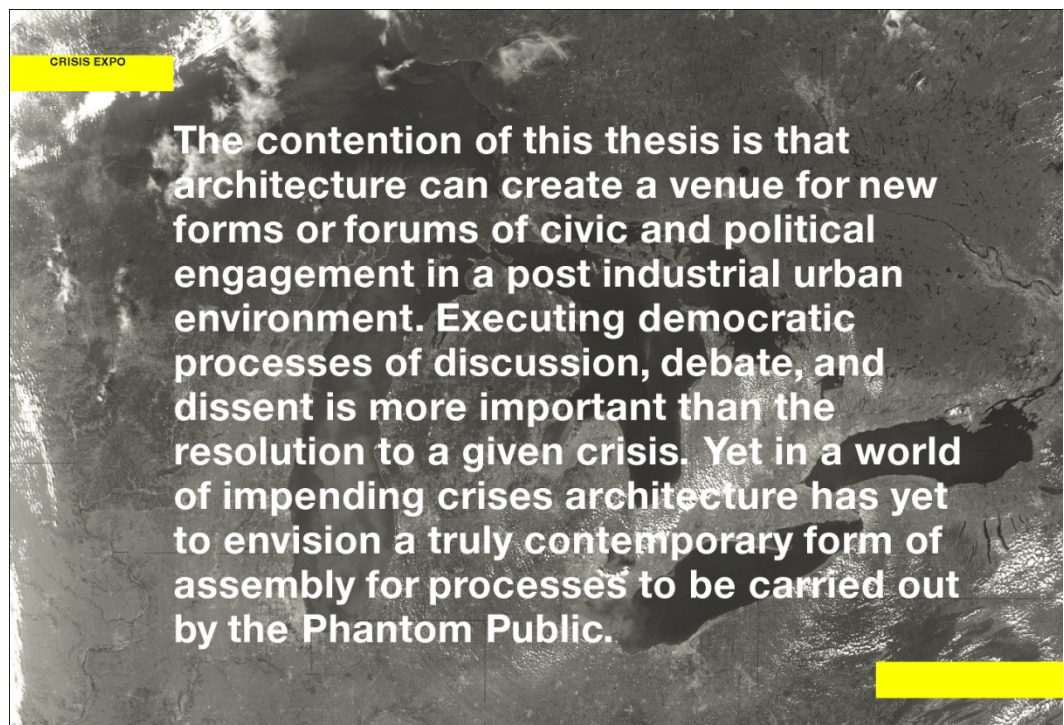
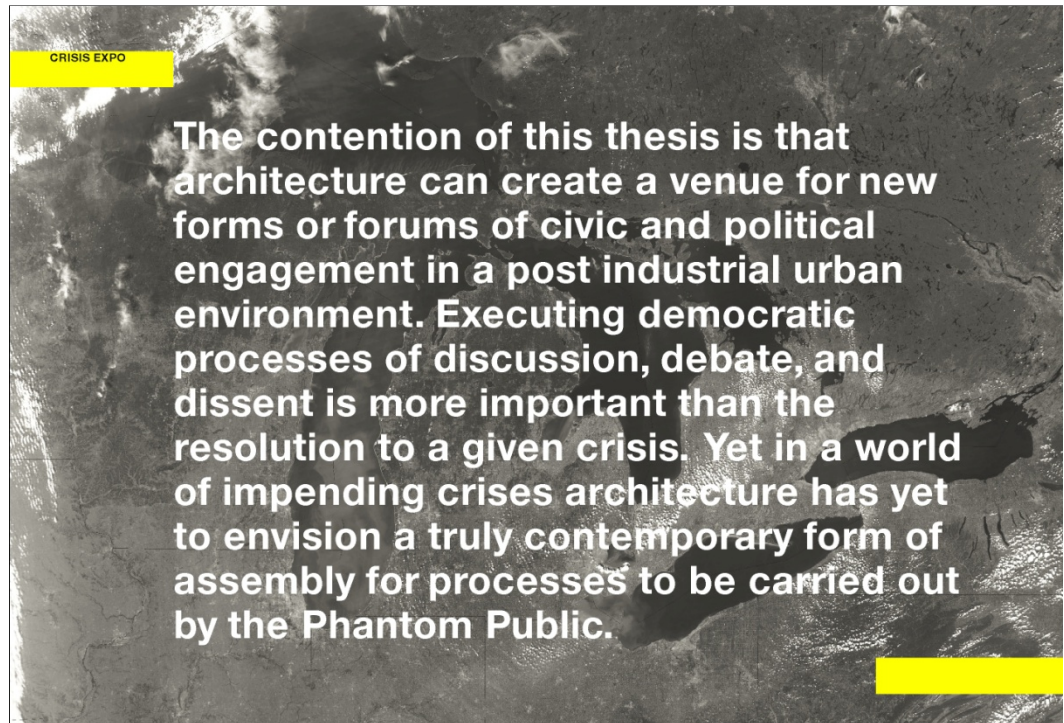
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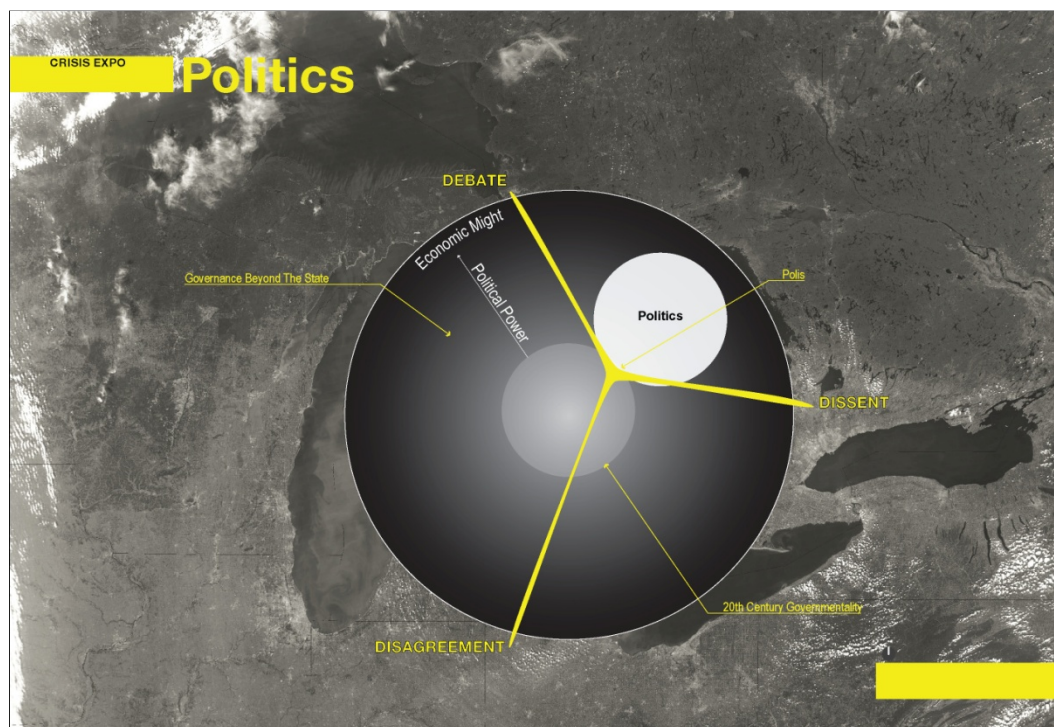
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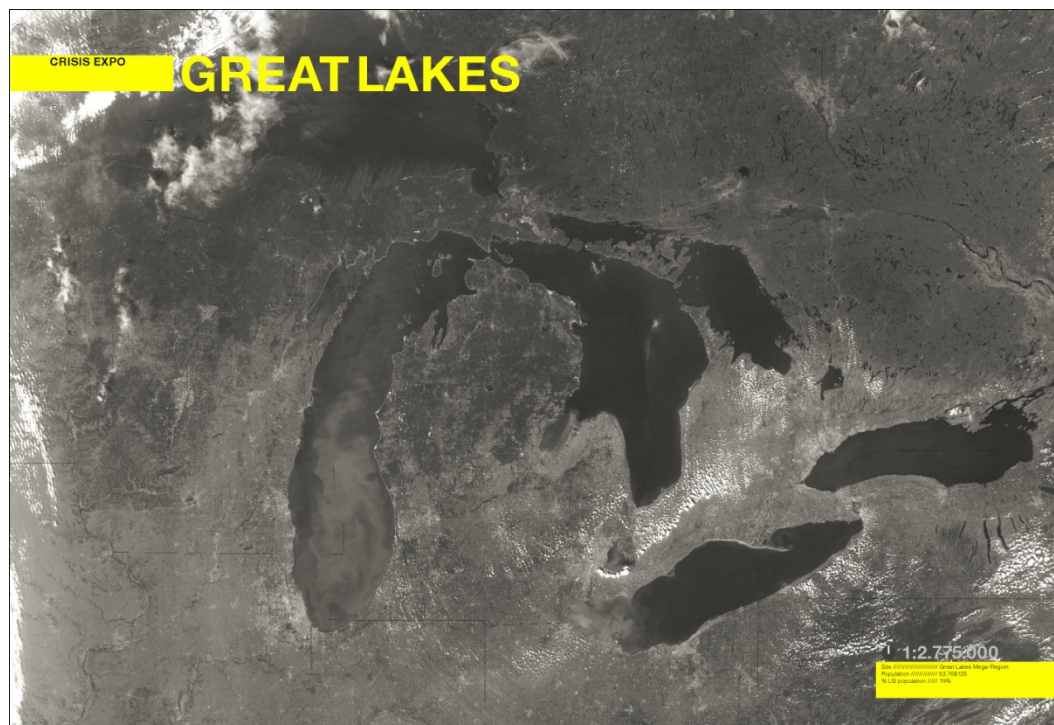
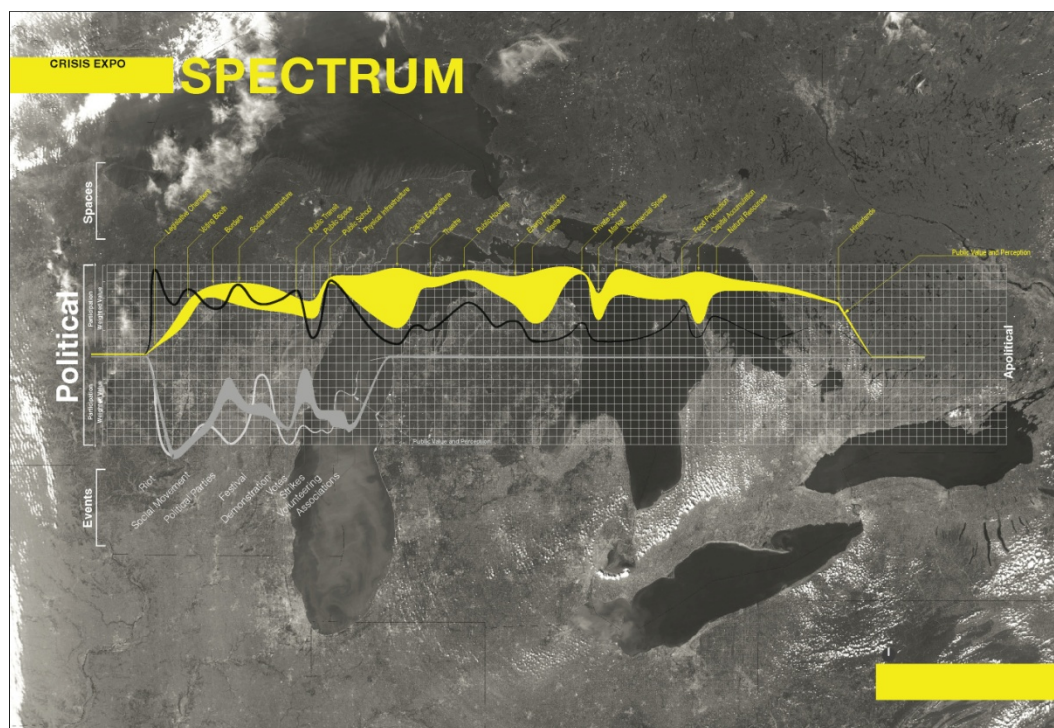
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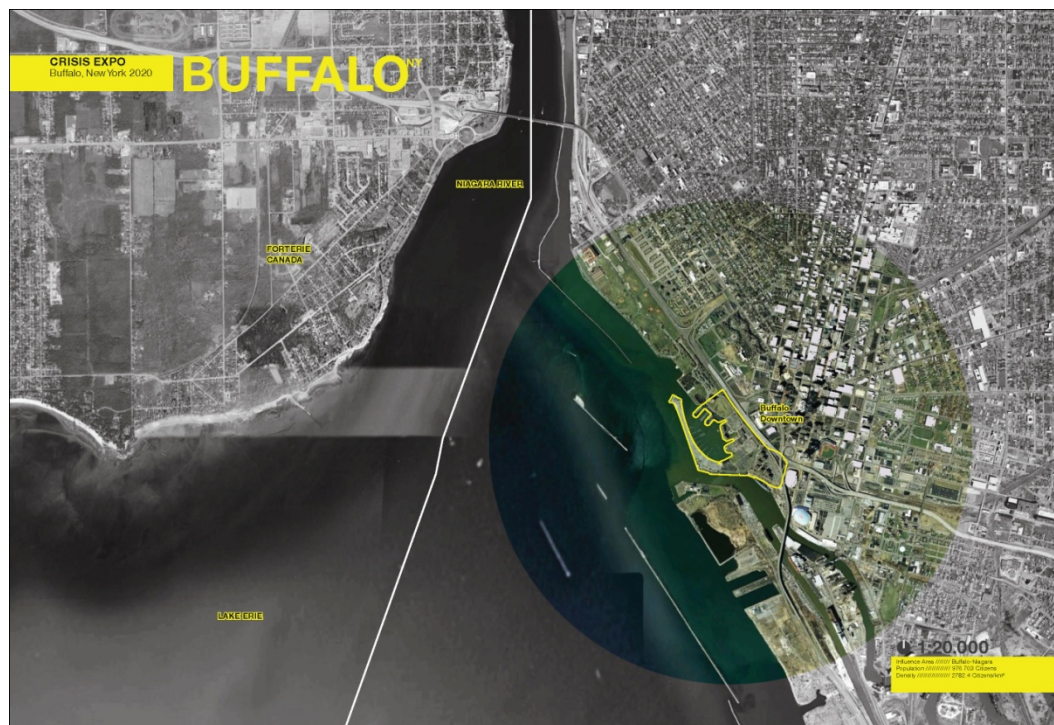
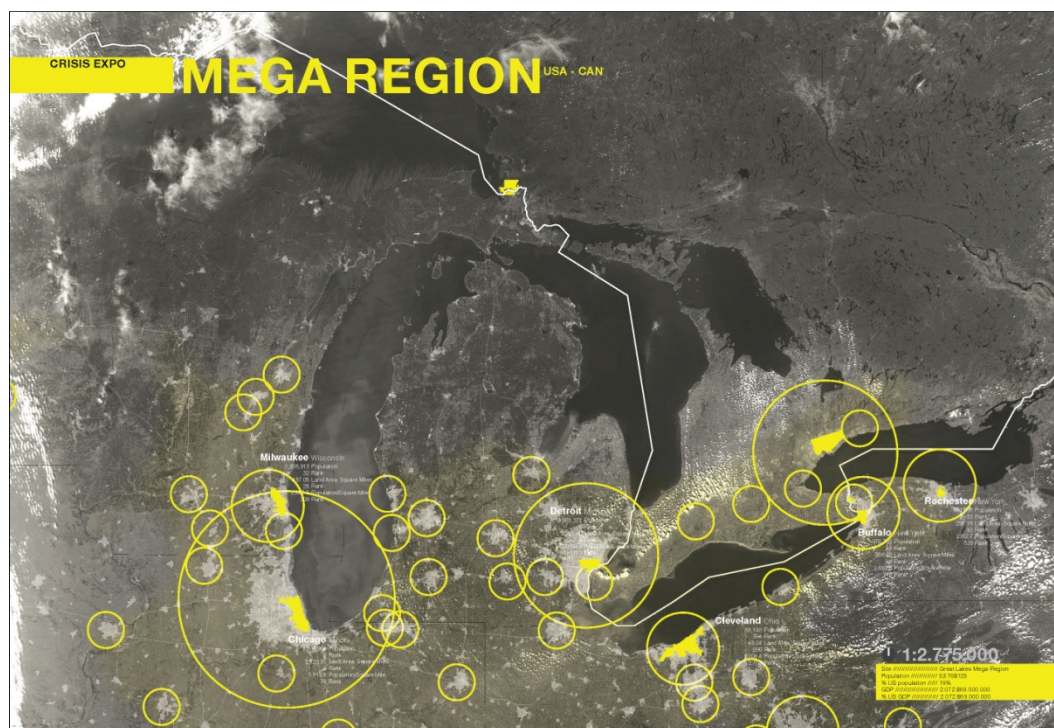
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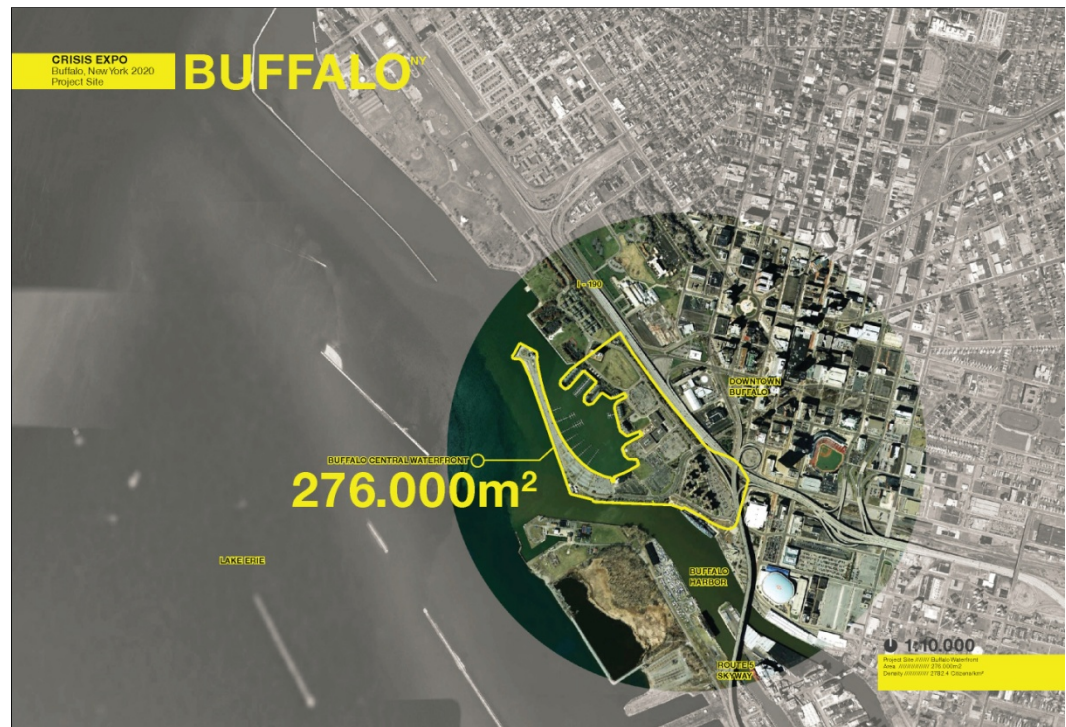




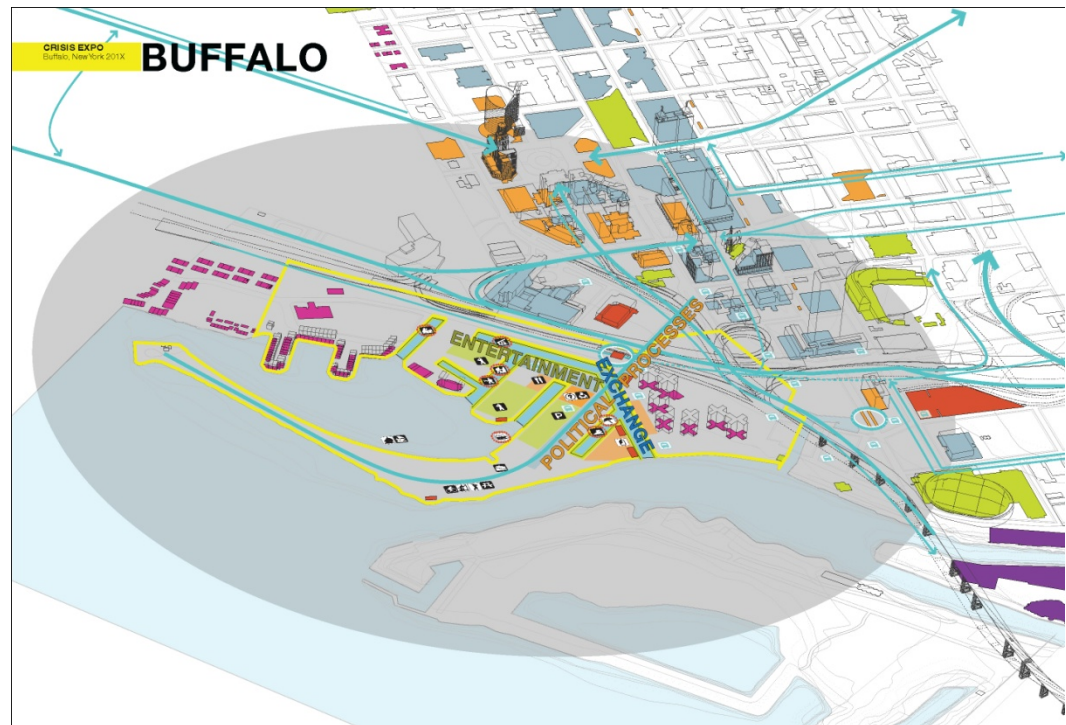






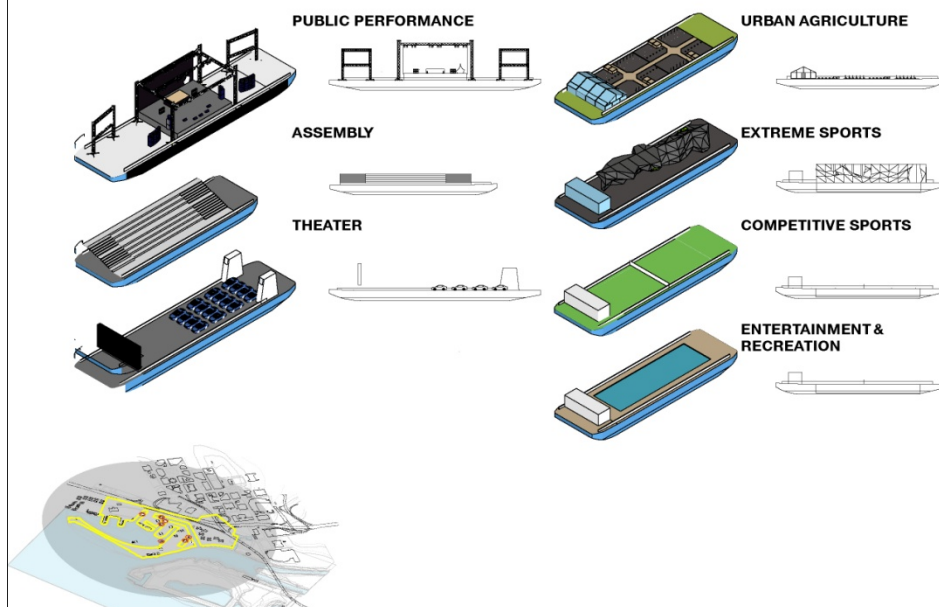






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